

**Published: Oct. 12, 2015, *Kokomo Tribune* [Page: A2]**

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## **Question Time: Naming killers?**

**Should mass shooting suspects be publicly identified?**

**By Rob Burgess**  
**Tribune night editor**

[**Editor's note:** To participate in future queries, keep an eye on our Twitter and Facebook accounts.]

After the mass shooting Oct. 1 at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon, which left nine victims and the gunman dead, Douglas County Sheriff John Hanlin announced he would not release the name of the deceased suspect. "You will not hear anyone from this law enforcement operation use his name," he said at a press conference the next day.

So, we wanted to know: "After a mass shooting, do you think news organizations should refrain from reporting the suspect's name? Why or why not?"

### **Your answers**

"It's giving the shooter the recognition he or she wanted." — **Brittany Cournoyer**

“Yes. They should be referred to as 'shooter' or 'crazy lunatic.’” — **Rita Jean Bowman-Conner**

“No! It's the news! Why does everyone ALWAYS want the news to stop reporting the news anymore? It's not just shooting, it's everything anymore. People always find a way to be [upset] about reporting.” — **Samira Sutton**

### **Our answers**

“Why not stop publishing the names of the suspects of any serious crime? Or maybe just names in general? Headline: Some guy elected President. Refusing to report a name only gives a suspect that much more power and mystique. Besides He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named is tough to fit into a headline.” — **Steve Mullen**

“My husband and I talked about this the other night. He convinced me that the suspect should be named - like suspects of any other crime are. The individual should be held accountable for his or her actions, and with the access to information the general public has today, I think the name would come out eventually - and it might as well come from credible sources. But I think it's worth re-assessing how we as the media cover mass shootings (and worth noting that mass shootings related to gang violence are covered very differently than school shootings, for example). In some cases, the shooters seem motivated by the notoriety they know they will receive once their horrific acts become part of the 24-hour news cycle. Leaving behind

lengthy manifestos about why they did it and elaborate plans for how to execute the violence, these people want to be known. It's hard for the media to do anything but play into their wishes and provide a platform for their message. I mean, we can't ignore a mass shooting. But I think dwelling less on the 'why' in our coverage could help. Will we ever find a satisfactory explanation for that type of violence? These tragedies become politicized when we try to explain the why behind them. Based on their particular interests, different groups will use a mass shooting to build a case for more gun control, better mental illness services, concealed carry, a tougher stance on bullying and any other cause that can be attached to the event. These are important issues to consider and worthy of media coverage. But let's delve into them without the name of a mass shooter attached. We should allow those shooters to fade from our collective attention as quickly as possible rather than continue to contribute to their fame, which the next potential shooter will only try to top.” — **Lauren Slagter**

“I’m of two minds on this. As a journalist, I understand the need to transmit relevant information related to a breaking news story. An update on such an event without including a central piece of the narrative would be irresponsible if it’s readily available. However, I see the other side of it, and many would-be mass shooters crave the attention they see others receive in the media. So, I think it’s a question of presentation. Once the name has been reported, we can turn our focus to the victims. Consequently, any commentary after the fact has wide discretion on what to highlight. That’s

where we have the most leverage in not giving these murders the fame they desire.” — **Rob Burgess**

**Rob Burgess**, Tribune night editor, may be reached by calling 765-454-8577, via email at [rob.burgess@kokomotribune.com](mailto:rob.burgess@kokomotribune.com) or on Twitter at [twitter.com/robaburg](https://twitter.com/robaburg).